DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 714 EC 301 962

AUTHOR Ivarie, Judith J.; Russell, Joy
TITLE School-Based Teams: Can They Increase "Verifiable" Referrals to Special Education?
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children Conference "Transactions: Changing and Affecting Change" (Cincinnati, OH, November 11-14, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Consultation Programs; Cooperative Programs; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Inservice Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Learning Problems; Peer Relationship; Program Effectiveness; *Referral; Regular and Special Education Relationship; Special Education; *Special Needs Students; *Teamwork; Training
IDENTIFIERS *Prereferral Intervention

ABSTRACT

This study describes the impact on referrals to special education when school-based teams composed of an administrator, classroom teacher, and special education teacher receive 16 hours of training in collaborative consultation and prereferral intervention. Data collected on 20 teams over a 2-year period indicate that teams trained in collaborative consultation can increase "verifiable" referrals (referrals which after case study do qualify for special education services) while providing timely support to classroom teachers with students not qualifying for special education services. Data were collected on faculty acceptance of teacher collaboration teams, along with teacher-perceived benefits and barriers to using school-based collaboration teams to meet the diverse needs of learners within the general classroom setting. Data indicated that, following implementation, a significant reduction occurred in faculty members' concern for acceptance of a formalized team-based, peer collaboration process in the school. Faculties pinpointed "time for consultation" as an ongoing concern with the use of the team process, and the most frequently cited advantage was "immediate help with problems." (Contains 12 references.) (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED355714

School-based Teams: Can They Increase "Verifiable" Referrals to Special Education?

Judith J. Ivarie, Ph.D., Professor of Special Education

Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois 61920

Joy Russell, M.S. Ed., Technical Assistant

Eastern Illinois Area of Special Education

Mattoon, Illinois 61938

CONTACT: Judith J. Ivarie

Eastern Illinois University

Department of Special Education

BB 112

Charleston IL 61920

(217) 348-8918, Home

(217) 581-5315, Office

Running Head: SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

Paper presented at Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children Conference "Transactions: Changing and Affecting Change" (Cincinnati, OH, November 11-14, 1992).

EC 301962

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Judith J. Ivarie

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This study describes the impact on referrals to special education when school-based teams composed of an administrator, classroom teacher and special education teacher receive 16 hours of training in collaborative consultation and pre-referral intervention. The data, collected on 20 teams over a two-year period, indicates that teams trained in collaborative consultation can increase "verifiable" referrals (referrals which after case study do qualify for special education services) while providing timely support to classroom teachers with students *not qualifying* for special education services. Data were collected on faculty acceptance of teacher collaboration teams along with teacher-perceived benefits and barriers to using school-based collaboration teams to meet the diverse needs of learners within the general classroom setting.

School-based Teams: Can They Increase "Verifiable"

Referrals to Special Education?

Each morning in classrooms across the United States, the teacher faces great student diversity. Classes are increasingly composed of students from varying cultures. Hodgkinson (1985) reported that this cultural diversity is steadily increasing. By the year 2000, one of every three students in our schools will be from an ethnic or national minority group. Compounding this situation even further is the fact that students from any cultural and ethnic group may also experience difficulty with academic performance and classroom behavior.

The Problem

Historically, classroom teachers have responded to such student diversity, especially when accompanied by academic and behavior problems, by making referrals to special education (Algozzine, Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1982). However, after full case studies, many of these students do not meet the criteria for special education services. According to Fuchs, Fuchs & Bahr (1990), these referrals often result in costly and timely delays in helping students succeed in the classroom. Meanwhile, teachers are left to face alone the challenges created by the diverse characteristics of these learners in the classroom.

Facing the ever increasing number of referrals for special education placement, a midwestern special education cooperative (serving 32 school districts in an eight county area) collected data focusing on referrals and placement of students into educational programs for mild disabilities. The results of this data collection indicated that a wide disparity existed among the districts in terms of the percentage of referred students who, upon completion of case study, met the criteria for special education services.

In an effort to meet the challenge of providing timely and appropriate educational services to all students in the least restrictive environment while providing support to

classroom teachers, a staff development project to provide collaborative consultation training for school-based teams was implemented. The special education cooperative provided the staff development and follow-up support to volunteer school-based teams over a two-year period.

School-based Team Staff Development

In 1986, Madeline Will lead a Department of Education Task Force which recommended in part that schools establish building-based support teams to provide assistance to classroom teachers dealing with the challenges of student diversity in learning performance. Such building-based teams have been found to be an effective way to provide needed support to the classroom teachers faced with high levels of student diversity while meeting the needs of learners in the general education classroom when appropriate (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989).

School-based teacher collaboration teams have been recommended as effective in both preventing and remediating problems dealing with serious learning and behavior problems in the schools (West, Cannon & Brown, 1986). Idol and West (1987) reported that effective consulting among school-based teams required both the "technical skills of effective teaching" as well as "communicative/interactive and problem-solving skills." After a national-level validation of 47 essential collaborative consultation behaviors, West, Idol & Cannon (1989) developed training experiences for school personnel in the process of collaborative consultation and effective teaming. These behaviors formed the foundation of the school-based team training for the current study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to gather data to answer to the following two questions:

1. **Will a faculty accept a school-based team process when dealing with learning and behavior problems?**

2. Will the use of a peer collaboration process increase the percentage of "verifiable" referrals to special education?

The expectation was that school-based teams would provide support to the classroom teacher in meeting student needs through curricular and/or instructional adaptations and, thereby, increase "verifiable" referrals (referrals which after case study do qualify for special education services) to special education.

Twelve teams began collaborative consultation training in the Fall of year one of the study. The focus of the training was to provide support to classroom teachers dealing with the challenge of students with diverse instructional needs. The following year, an additional 16 teams requested and received training to the collaborative consultation process.

Design of the Study

Subjects

The subjects in the study included 20 teams of three volunteers (classroom teacher, special educator, principal) from each school district. Principals were included in the team since they have been found to be a critical factor in the success of peer collaboration (West & Idol, 1990). In return for the collaborative consultation training, these participants agreed to attend all sessions and implement a school-based team at their respective school sites.

Procedures

The training consisted of two five-hour training sessions two months apart during the Fall semester with two three-hour sessions each Spring for a total of 16 hours. Between training sessions, three technical assistants from the special education cooperative who participated in the training conducted follow-up and provided support activities with teams on location at each of the school sites.

The goal of the training sessions was "to increase participants' teaming competencies while developing educational programs for learners with diverse curricular and instructional needs in the regular classroom setting when appropriate to student needs." The knowledge-base and competencies developed by participants focused on the following major topics:

1. Principles and practices of collaborative consultation (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1986),
2. Pre-referral intervention (Graden, Casey & Christenson, 1985; Illinois State Board of Education, 1990), and,
3. Problem-solving process (West, Idol & Cannon, 1989).

The format of the training sessions included: direct instruction, cooperative learning, team-building, and simulations using problem scenarios submitted by the school-based teams. During training, time was also used for school-based team collaboration as well as collaboration among teams.

Findings

Descriptive data were available for nine of the 12 teams trained in the collaborative consultation process during year one and 11 of the 16 teams trained in the year two of the project. The following data represent the findings in this descriptive study.

"Will a faculty accept a school-based team process when dealing with learning and behavior problems?"

This concern was expressed consistently by team members during the training process. While faculties are accustomed to accepting "expert" consultation (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists), teams questioned whether or not faculties would accept "peer" consultation (e.g., teachers, special educators). Additionally, the idea that a faculty member *requesting* support from a school-based team might be perceived as less competent than other teachers by the principal and other teachers was expressed.

To gather data on these concerns, the faculty in each school were surveyed ***prior*** to implementation of the collaborative process and ***after*** four months of implementation of the peer collaboration process.

In each survey faculty members were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 indicating a high level of concern) his/her concern with implementing a formalized team-based, peer collaboration process in the school (Table 1). Prior to implementation in Year One of the study, faculty (n = 135) mean ratings of 3.8 (on a five-point scale) suggested a high level of concern for acceptance of the team-based, peer collaboration process. After four months of implementation, however, a mean rating of 2.8 reflected a significant ($p < .001$) reduction in that concern.

Insert Table 1 Here

Similar results were found in Year Two of the study (Table 1). Initial mean ratings of faculty (n = 165) were 3.6 on a 5-point scale. Whereas, a mean rating of 3.2 after four months found a significant ($p < .001$) reduction in concern by faculty.

To further examine the concerns, faculty were requested to list their major concerns along with the ratings. The top three concerns were identical for both years (Table 2). Faculty were concerned about the "time for collaboration," "acceptance of peer collaboration," and the "possibility of prolonged delays in access to special education services" by students needing help.

Insert Table 2 here

The survey was administered to faculties by their respective teams *after* the initial four months of implementation of the peer collaboration process. Additionally, this survey requested that faculties add their view of advantages, if any, to the implementation of a peer collaboration process along with their concerns about such an implementation.

Only one major concern, "time for collaboration," remained constant from the survey administered prior to implementation of the peer collaboration process (Table 2).

The other two concerns ("faculty acceptance of peer collaboration" and "prolonged delay in access to special education services") were not reported by faculties as concerns after four months of implementation of the peer collaboration process.

Rather, new concerns focused on the need to move the collaboration process to other schools in the districts. Specifically, faculty identified the "need for expansion of collaboration to all schools in the district" and for the process to include "participation by all faculty members."

The three most frequently mentioned advantages to implementation of the team-based peer collaboration process included "immediate help with problems," "team ownership and support for problems," and, "increased variety of ideas and information sharing."

In response to question one, "Will faculty accept a school-based peer collaboration process when dealing with learning and behavior problems?", the descriptive data in this study indicated that acceptance by faculty was increased over the initial four months implementation . A significant change in mean rating by faculty was supported by faculty comments relating both to the "concerns" and "advantages" of peer collaboration. These qualitative comments supported the quantitative data. Together, the qualitative and quantitative data suggested a positive attitude shift of faculties toward the use of school-based teams for dealing with student-centered learning and behavior problems.

Will the use of a peer collaboration process reduce the percent of "unverifiable" referrals to special education?

In the initial four months of year one of the study, the nine school-based teams received 32 requests for assistance from their faculties. Of these 32 requests, 19 were handled successfully through curricular and instructional adaptations while 13 were referred to special education for a full case study. Of the 13, 11 or 86% were later verified

as qualifying for special education services. Prior to implementation of the school-based team process, the percentage of verifiable referrals to special education from these nine districts ranged from 17% to 84%.

In the initial four months of Year Two of the study, the eleven school-based teams received 36 requests for assistance from their faculties. Of these 36 requests, 24 were handled successfully through curricular and instructional adaptations while 12 were referred to special education case study. Of the 12, 11 or 92% were later verified as qualifying for special education services. Prior to implementation of the school-based team process, the percentage of verifiable referrals from these eleven districts ranged from 36% to 72%.

In response to question two, "Will the use of a peer collaboration process increase "verifiable" referrals to special education?", the data from the initial four months of implementation in both years of the study indicated that the percentage of verifiable referrals was increased.

Discussion

The acceptance attitude of faculties toward school-based team peer collaboration can be developed. The data from this descriptive study indicated a significant shift from a high level of concern to a supportive attitude toward the school-based team process (Table 1). This change within the initial four months of implementation was supported by both quantitative and qualitative information. This information was based on responses from 135 faculty in year one and replicated with 165 faculty in year two.

Comments from these faculties pinpointed "time for consultation" as the one, on-going concern with the use of the team process (Table 2). Even after four months of implementation, this concern remained high.

The supportive attitude shift was indicated by a significant reduction in the quantitative rating which was confirmed by faculty comments in both years of the study.

Faculties who initially questioned "acceptance of peer collaboration" no longer expressed this concern. Instead, they expressed concern that there was a need to expand "collaboration to all schools in the district." Further, they stated a desire that "all members of the faculty have the opportunity to participate.

A major shift was also noted in the initial concern that the team process would create a "possibility of a prolonged delay in access to special education services." Not only was this concern not expressed after implementation, it became a stated advantage. "Immediate help with problems" was the most frequently given advantage of the team process. Instead of a 60-day wait to find out if a child qualified for special education services, faculty could receive technical and psychological assistance within the week. This assistance was used to increase the curricular and/or instructional adaptations to meet individual student needs in the classroom. For a student needing special education services, the implementation of these curricular and instructional adaptations provided the documentation supporting referral and case study.

Schools using the team process did increase the percentage of "verifiable" referrals (referrals which after case study do qualify for special education.) Prior to implementation of the team process, school districts involved in year one of the study had a wide range of verifiable referrals (17% to 84%). After using the team process, these schools maintained a consistent percentage (86%) of verifiable referrals over the initial four months of implementation.

Teams trained in year two of the study had similar results. Prior to implementation, a range of 36% to 72% of the referrals were later verified as qualifying for special education services. In contrast, 92% of the referrals were verified during the first four months of implementation.

After four months of implementation, the school-based peer collaboration process has been successful. Faculty have made a positive shift in attitude toward the

peer collaboration process and the percentage of verifiable referrals has increase. Will these initial findings continue over time? Follow-up data collection is necessary to answer this critical question.

Practical Implications

Much of the challenge of student diversity related to learning and behavior problems can be addressed successfully by classroom teachers with support. One effective way in which teachers can receive this support is through the implementation of a school-based peer collaboration process.

In this study teachers reported that the peer collaboration process provided them with "immediate help with problems." In contrast, when teachers referred students to special education, the time delay in getting help to students could be up to 60 days. This delay is frequently due to a backlog of referrals many of which are not found to qualify for special education placement after case study (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990).

Teachers requesting assistance became an integral part of the team. Through the collaborative process both curricular and instructional adaptations were generated, discussed, and selected in a problem-solving format. The technical assistance was available within one week of the request for assistance from the team.

The technical assistance was used to benefit students in two ways. First, in the case of students later referred to special education, the technical assistance helped the classroom teacher support the need for the referral to special education. Each curricular and/or instructional adaptation was implemented and its effectiveness documented. The information demonstrated the efforts made by the classroom teacher to provide educational services to students in the "least restrictive" environment. Secondly, in the case of student not referred to special education, the technical assistance increased the repertoire of curricular and instructional adaptation which had the potential of increasing success for students with learning and behavior problems in the classroom.

The peer collaboration process provided psychological as well as technical assistance. The psychological assistance received from the school-based peer collaboration team was described as "team ownership and support of problems." With all of the challenges in today's classroom, the teacher must be able to ask for help and support. The myth that "a competent teacher can handle all of the problems" needs to be debunked. Rather, the competent teacher asks for assistance when needed. In some instances, the teacher was able to deal with the classroom problems using the technical assistance of the team. In instances of more challenging problems, she experienced the psychological assistance in terms of supportive empathy of her peers.

School-based peer collaboration takes time. A consistent concern expressed by faculty was "time of collaboration." If the peer collaborative process is to be practical, this valid concern of faculty needs to be addressed.

Administrative leadership in prioritizing regularly scheduled team meetings was critical. One principal, committed to regularly scheduled meetings, commented that an useful benefit of the team process resulted when teams used this time to focus on the "prevention of problems" in addition to providing immediate assistance.

Another time factor to be considered is related to the initial team training in peer collaboration. Most teachers collaborate on an informal basis. However, the establishment of a formal collaborative process requires time to refine the technical skills and the interactive communication competencies through a systematic staff development training program.

References

Algozzine, B., Christenson, S., & Ysseldyke, J. E. (1982). An analysis of the incident of special class placement: The masses are burgeoning. *Journal of Special Education, 17*, 141-147.

Chalfant, J. C., Pysh, M. (1989). Teacher assistance teams: Five descriptive studies on 96 teams. *Remedial and Special Education, 10* (6), 49-62.

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Bahr, M. W. (1990). Mainstream assistance teams: A scientific basis for the art of consultation. *Exceptional Children, 57* (2), 128-139.

Graden, J. L., Casey, A., & Christenson, S. L. (1985a). Implementing a prereferral intervention system: Part 1, the model. *Exceptional Children, 51* (5), 377-384.

Hodgkinson, H. L. (1985). *All in the system: Demographics of education--Kindergarten through graduate school.* Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Idol, L., Paolucci-Whitcomb, P., & Nevin, A. (1986). *Collaborative Consultation.* Austin, TX: ProEd.

Idol, L., & West, J. F. (1987). Consultation in special education (part II): Training and practice. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 20* (8), 474-497.

Illinois State Board of Education. (1990). *Review/intervention assistance process.* Unpublished manuscript. Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education.

West, J. F., Cannon, G., & Brown, P. (1986). Research and training in collaborative school consultation. In B. Scott & J. Gilliam (Eds.), *Topics in behavior disorders.* Austin, TX: Behavior Learning Center.

West, J. F., & Idol, L. (1990). Collaborative consultation in the education of mildly handicapped and at-risk students. *Remedial and Special Education, 11* (1), 22-31.

West, J. F., Idol, L., & Cannon, G. (1989). *Collaboration in the schools: An inservice and preservice curriculum or teachers, support staff, and administrators.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Will, M. (1986). *Educating students with learning problems: A shared responsibility.* Washington, DC: U.S. Dept of Education, Office of Special Ed./Rehab. Services.

Table I. Faculty Acceptance Attitudes Toward the School-based Team Collaboration Process

	Faculty	Mean Prior to Implementation	Mean After Implementation
Year 1	n = 135	3.8[1]	2.8[1,2]
Year 2	n = 165	3.6[1]	3.2[1,2]

[1] Scale of 1 to 5, 5 indicating a high level of concern

[2] $p < .001$, t-test of related means

Table 2. Faculty Comments Regarding the School-based Team Peer Collaboration Process: Concerns and Advantages*

Concerns Prior to Implementation	**Concerns After Implementation**	**Advantages after Implementation**
Time for Collaboration	Time for Collaboration	Immediate help with problems
Faculty acceptance of peer collaboration	Need for expansion of collaboration to all schools in the district	Team ownership and support of problems
Possibility of prolonged delay in access to special education services	Participation by all faculty members	Increase variety of ideas and information sharing

*Based on responses from 200 faculty